

April 7, 2021

RE: House Bill No. 5672 (support) and Budget Article 13, Section 6 (support)

Chair Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to write in support of House Bill 5672 and Budget Article 13, Section 6. The 41 members of the Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families (RICCF) are deeply committed both to comprehensive and quality services for children, youth, and their families, and to the development of a qualified and appropriately compensated child- and family-serving workforce. With these dual priorities, we support the goals of the RI Right from the Start campaign and the Governor's proposed budget article addressing childcare reimbursement rates as critical pieces of legislation to invest in childcare on behalf of our youngest Rhode Islanders and their families.

House Bill 5672

Ensuring access of families to appropriate childcare is a safety and well-being investment, and we support both the increased access to the Childcare Assistance Program for families up to 225% of the poverty level as well as a cap on co-payments at 7% of income. Equally, we support the proposed tiered rate structure and infant bonus on the provider side. This past year, RICCF partnered with the Hassenfeld Institute for Public Leadership at Bryant University to issue a report on the Human Services Workforce (which includes the childcare workforce) in August 2020 (the fact sheet is attached). Hassenfeld's analyses of recent American Community Survey (ACS) data found that the:

"...Human services workforce is composed of over 17,000 Rhode Islanders who both work and live within the Ocean State, who have contributed an estimated \$63 million in state and local taxes in 2018. This workforce is 80% female, more ethnically and racially diverse than the workforce, and more likely to be disabled. While compensation varies by function, human services jobs are generally considered to be in a low wage sector. As the human services workforce is more representative of women, people of color, those who are foreign born, and those who have disabilities, increased wages for the human services workforce could contribute to advancing pay equity in Rhode Island. Depending on compensation changes, this could potentially also decrease reliance on public assistance programs for human services workers."¹ According to both the ACS analyses and Bureau of Labor Statistics data, childcare worker wages are below the sector average at \$12.27/hr. in 2019.² Rate increases are critical to achieve more viable wages and stabilize the childcare system.

Budget Article 13, Section 6

Research indicates that early childhood education supports child safety and wellbeing³ in addition to their learning and support of parents' workforce participation. It is critical that our state have the most capable providers possible who can serve all our state's children, no matter what their needs. This requires investment and incentives to drive for quality. Incremental increases to rates will continue to strengthen the childcare workforce and program quality. As a coalition of providers of services, we support tiered payments that are linked to quality. We strongly support the state in creating incentives for quality enhancement, specialized care, and alternative or non-traditional programming, and urge support for this.

¹ The Human Services Workforce in RI, Hassenfeld Institute for Public Leadership, August 2020. pg. 2. www.riccf.org

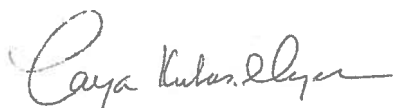
² Ibid, pg. 11 and Bureau of Labor Statistics RI Occupation and Employment Statistics, May 2019.
<https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes399011.htm>

³ US Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families retrieved from
https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/opre_2016_benefitschildwelfaresystem_v16_508.pdf

The RI Childhood is Essential Act and Budget Article 13, Section 6 make necessary and reasonable investments to ensure that all Rhode Island children are healthy and safe and preparing to succeed in school. We urge your support of H-5672 and Budget Article 13, Section 6.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Tanja Kubas-Meyer".

Tanja Kubas-Meyer
Executive Director